

Introduction to Philosophy of Religion

Instructor Information

Instructor

Andrew del Rio

Email

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Office Hours

WAG 319 | M/W 11-12

General Course Information

Course Place and Time

JES A216A

M/W/F 10-11am

Course Description

Philosophy is an attempt to answer the Great Questions. In this course we will attempt to answer some of the great questions of religion. These questions are of immense importance. The course of many people's lives, perhaps our lives, rests on certain answers to these questions. Are there any good arguments for the existence of God? What arguments are there against the existence of God? Is agnosticism necessary in light of all the religious disagreement? What about science; has science undermined religious faith? Assuming faith can be rational, can people who do not study philosophy of religion (or people without philosophical arguments) have a rational faith? Is faith just inherently irrational as such? Philosophy is also a way of life devoted to the pursuit of wisdom. As we study the questions above, we will also seek to grow in virtue—intentionally pursuing some moral, religious, secular, practical, or intellectual character development that will hopefully take each of us, through our study of philosophy of religion, a step closer to wisdom and a flourishing life.

Course Objectives

- Learn to find, clarify, and evaluate arguments
- Understand the dominant questions, theories, and figures in philosophy of religion
- Reflect on and cultivate a virtuous character
- Interpret philosophical texts
- Write analytical and argumentative papers on philosophical themes
- Devise philosophical arguments in the context of group discussion and debate
- Experience the joys of philosophical wonder

Course Materials

All readings are available on Canvas. The following are the readings for the course, in order. Each is numbered on Canvas so they appear in this order. The approximate number of pages for each reading is indicated in the parenthesis. Pace yourself accordingly.

1. William Rowe - Introduction to *Philosophy of Religion* (3)
2. Elizabeth Burns - What is Philosophy of Religion? (6)
3. Michael Peterson, et al. - Thinking about God (9)
4. Chad Meister - Religion and the Philosophy of Religion (6)
5. Joshua Rasmussen - When Reason Leads to Doubt (7)
6. E. J. Coffman - Finding, Clarifying, and Evaluating Arguments (26)
7. Joshua Rasmussen - The Bridge to Reason (11)
8. Joshua Rasmussen - The Foundation Theory (15)
9. Michael Murray and Michael Rea - Attributes of God (36)
10. Blaise Pascal - The Wager (3)
11. Ian Hacking - The Logic of Pascal's Wager (8)
12. Anselm of Canterbury - The Ontological Argument from *Proslogion* (2)
13. Gaunilo of Marmoutiers - Critique of Anselm (3)
14. Alvin Plantinga - The Modal Ontological Argument (9)
15. Thomas Aquinas - The Cosmological Argument (2)
16. William Lane Craig - The Kalam Cosmological Argument (8)
17. J. L. Mackie - Critique of the Cosmological Argument (7)
18. William Paley - The Argument from Design (3)
19. David Hume - Critique of the Argument from Design (7)
20. Robin Collins - God, Design, and Fine-Tuning (21)
21. Teresa of Avila - Religious Experiences (3)
22. William Alston and Evan Fales - Does Religious Experience Justify Religious Belief? (29)
23. Richard Swinburne - The Probability of the Resurrection of Jesus (14)
24. Timothy McGrew and John DePoe - Natural Theology and the Uses of Argument (14)
25. Daniel Dennett and Alvin Plantinga - Science and Religion (55)
26. J. L. Mackie - Miracles and Testimony (6)
27. Richard Swinburne - Miracles (9)
28. J. L. Mackie - Evil and Omnipotence (9)
29. Alvin Plantinga - The Free Will Defense (18)
30. William Rowe - The Problem of Evil and Some Varieties of Atheism (8)
31. John Hick - Soul-Making Theodicy (7)
32. Louise Antony - No Good Reason (9)
33. Eleanore Stump - The Problem of Evil (11)
34. Marilyn McCord Adams - Horrendous Evils and the Goodness of God (7)
35. Justin McBrayer - Skeptical Theism (10)
36. J. L. Schellenberg and Paul Moser - Does Divine Hiddenness Justify Atheism? (28)
37. Elizabeth Jackson - The Nature and Rationality of Faith (12)
38. Trent Dougherty and Chris Tweedt - Religious Epistemology (8)
39. Alvin Plantinga - The Reformed Objection to Natural Theology (9)
40. William Hasker - The Case of the Intellectually Sophisticated Theist (4)

Canvas

Canvas is your friend so check Canvas regularly! Readings will be available through Canvas. All assignments will be submitted on Canvas. All updates to the course schedule and assignments will be announced on Canvas. Attendance, reading/lecture quizzes, and class surveys will also be administered through Canvas. Therefore you will need a smartphone, tablet, or computer connected to the internet in each class.

Course Evaluation

Attendance: 5%	Paper #1: 10%
Participation: 5%	Paper #2: 15%
Logic Assignment: 5%	Paper #3: 25%
Virtue Project Part I and II: 10%	Final Exam: 25%

Grading Scheme

Percentage grades determine letter grades as follows:

<u>Letter</u>	<u>Percentage</u>	<u>Letter</u>	<u>Percentage</u>
A	100-93	C	77-73
A-	93-90	C-	73-70
B+	90-87	D+	70-67
B	87-83	D	67-63
B-	83-80	D-	63-60
C+	80-77	F	60-0

Attendance: 5%

You will get the most out of this class through consistent attendance! In order to motivate you to attend, you will only be allowed 5 absences. Each additional absence will incur a penalty of 2% off the final grade, up to 5% points. Attendance will be taken through Canvas.

Participation: 5%

You will get the most out of this class through consistent participation! The more participation there is, the more the whole class benefits. Your participation will be evaluated through in-class reading quizzes, in-class lecture quizzes, or in-class ungraded surveys, all taken through Canvas. These quizzes will not be very hard but will require attentive reading of the assignments and attentive participation in class. Your 6 lowest quiz grades will be dropped.

Logic Assignment: 5%

Read Coffman's "Finding, Clarifying, and Evaluating Arguments" and complete the worksheet "Logic Set" posted in Files on Canvas in the Logic Folder. This assignment will test your understanding of the concepts in Coffman's paper. Like all the other assignments, you must submit this assignment on Canvas, but unlike all the other assignments, scans of hand written work are permitted.

Virtue Project Part I: 5%

Reflect on your own character and some virtue that you would like to nurture in your own life. I suggest looking at the optional reading “Thirteen Virtues” by Benjamin Franklin for inspiration. The virtue you choose can be one that Franklin discusses but need not be. It can be moral or intellectual, secular or religious. Charity, Generosity, Hopefulness, Patience, Open-mindedness, Compassion, Intellectual Courage, Discipline, Mindfulness, Faithfulness, Kindness, Friendship, Self-Control, and Gratitude are just a few of many other virtues. Choose a virtue you are comfortable sharing about in a Virtue Journal (see Virtue Project Part II). Write 150-200 words (1) naming the virtue of your choice, (2) describing it in your own words, (3) describing a little about why you chose that virtue, and (4) describing some practice, method, or strategy that you will employ for 12 weeks this semester in order to cultivate that virtue in your life. Be realistic and keep it simple! This assignment will be given full credit, 75% credit, or no credit. Include a Word Count.

Virtue Project Part II: 5%

For 12 weeks keep a Virtue Journal. Once a week briefly record in a document how that week went with respect to your desired virtue development. Did you forget to think about it? Did you notice a lot of moments of vice? Did your practice seem to bear some fruit? Was practicing for your chosen virtue easier than before? Your Virtue Journal should have 12 *dated* entries. The final entry should be a bit longer and comment on the 12 weeks overall rather than just the 12th week.

For example:

Gratitude Journal

3rd Week: Sep. 27th

This week I did better remembering to think about gratitude. I noticed more things to be thankful for this week and found myself thanking people for little things in a more genuine way.

4th Week: Oct. 4th

This week I thought about three people in my life that have really brought me joy, but that I have rarely expressed gratitude towards. I wrote three thank you notes.

Paper #1: An Autobiographical Note on Religion: 10%

Write 500 words (plus or minus no more than 50 words) describing your relationship with religion. Do you have a religious background? Are you inclined to believe there is a God (or gods), are you inclined towards agnosticism, or are you inclined towards atheism? Why is that? What do you think causes you to think the way that you do? Can you identify any desire for either atheism or theism? That is, do you hope one of these is true? If so, which one and why? Include a Word Count.

Paper #2: The Best Argument for God: 15%

Write 750 words (plus or minus no more than 100 words) explaining what you consider to be the best argument for the existence of God. This should be some argument that we have discussed in class. Focus on presenting a regimented argument and then providing support for the premises. Then identify what you take to be the weakest premise in the argument. Include a Word Count.

Paper #3: God: The Best Argument For and Against: 25%

Revise Paper #2 and add to it an explanation of what you consider to be the best argument *against* the existence of God. Identify in each argument what you take to be the weakest premise. Evaluate which of the two arguments is stronger and explain why. Write 1500 words (plus or minus no more than 100 words; this number includes the content from Paper #2, but that content can be abridged if necessary). Include a Word Count.

Final Exam: 25% (date and time TBA)

There will be a cumulative multiple choice and true/false exam. A study guide will be provided.

Course Policies

Technology Policy

Sometimes tech hurts. Research shows that using laptops, tablets, and phones in class is bad for both you and your classmates.

- You don't learn as much
- You don't remember as much
- You take bad notes
- You perform worse on tests
- You distract others & they perform worse on tests¹

Unless you have requested and received permission to do so, the use of phones/laptops/tablets is prohibited except for the use of Canvas—taking Canvas quizzes/surveys, referencing Canvas readings. If your phones/laptops/tablets are out for any other purpose, you will be asked to put them away. If a problem persists, points may be deducted from your Participation grade at my discretion.

Late Work Policy

Assignment grades will be penalized 5% if submitted within the first 24 hours after they are due, 10% if submitted within 24-48 hours after they are due, 15% within 48-72 hours, etc. This penalty is doubled for Paper #3.

Rewrite Policy

If you receive a grade of less than 85% on Paper #1 or #2, you may revise the paper (based on my feedback) and resubmit it for a maximum grade of 85%. The paper will be regraded and is not guaranteed to receive a higher grade. If the paper is worse it will receive a lower grade. Whatever grade is assigned for a rewrite becomes the final grade for that paper assignment. You have two weeks from the time your initial grade is returned to you to submit a rewrite. There are no rewrites for Paper #3 because there is not sufficient time at the end of the semester.

¹ <http://dailynous.com/2018/08/15/discourage-laptops-class-slides-can-show-students/>

Plagiarism Policy

Plagiarism is the practice of intentionally or unintentionally using someone else's writing without properly acknowledging the source. **Plagiarism will not be tolerated.** Every semester I discover someone plagiarizing. Do not plagiarize! Again, you plagiarize when:

- You do not make clear exactly what you borrow from a source.
- You do not make clear exactly what the source is from which you borrow.²

If you submit plagiarized work on any assignment you will receive a provisional grade of F for the class and will be referred to the Office of the Dean of Students for disciplinary action.

All assignments in this course may be processed by TurnItIn, a tool that compares submitted material to an archived database of published work to check for potential plagiarism. Other methods may also be used to determine if a paper is the student's original work. Regardless of the results of any TurnItIn submission, the faculty member will make the final determination as to whether or not a paper has been plagiarized.³

Further Information

Students with Disabilities

Students with disabilities may request appropriate academic accommodations from the Division of Diversity and Community Engagement, Services for Students with Disabilities. See <https://diversity.utexas.edu/disability/>.

Advice on Reading and Writing Philosophy

Reading philosophy is difficult. It is a slow process of sustained intellectual effort. Give yourself ample time to complete the readings. You will benefit by first reading Jim Pryor's "Guidelines on Reading Philosophy," found in Files on Canvas in the Guidance and Study Aids folder. Writing philosophy is also difficult. Good argumentative writing is concise, clear, simple, and well-structured. You will benefit by reading Jim Pryor's "Guidelines on Writing a Philosophy Paper," found in the Files folder on Canvas.

² Lewis Vaughn, *Writing Philosophy*, Oxford: Oxford University Press (2006), 99.

³ This paragraph is from the "Statement from the Faculty Writing Committee."

Course Schedule

Date	Topic	Reading/Assignment
INTRODUCTORY MATERIAL		
Week 1	Syllabus Overview What is philosophy of religion?	Rowe, Burns, Peterson et al., Meister, Rasmussen
Week 2	Logic, Arguments, and Reasoning	Coffman Rasmussen Virtue Project Part I
Week 3	What is the nature of God? Classical Theism	Rasmussen, Murray and Rea Logic Set
Labor Day		Make 1st Virtue Journal Entry
PART I: REASONS FOR BELIEVING IN GOD		
Week 4	Why believe in God? Pascal's Wager Ontological Arguments	Pascal, Hacking, Anslem, Gaunilo, Plantinga Make 2nd Virtue Journal Entry
Week 5	Why believe in God? Cosmological Arguments	Aquinas, Craig, Mackie Make 3rd Virtue Journal Entry
Week 6	Why believe in God? Teleological Arguments	Paley, Hume, Collins Make 4th Virtue Journal Entry
Week 7	Why believe in God? Religious Experience	Saint Teresa, Alston, Fales Paper #1 Make 5th Virtue Journal Entry
Week 8	Why believe in God? Miracles and the Cumulative Case	Swinburne, McGrew and DePoe Make 6th Virtue Journal Entry
PART II: SCIENCE AND RELIGION		
Week 9	Is science for or against religion?	Dennett and Plantinga Make 7th Virtue Journal Entry
PART III: REASONS FOR NOT BELIEVING IN GOD		
Week 10	Why not believe in God? Miracles II Problem of Evil I	Mackie, Swinburne Mackie Paper #2 Make 8th Virtue Journal Entry

Date	Topic	Reading/Assignment
Week 11	Why not believe in God? Problem of Evil II	Plantinga, Rowe Make 9th Virtue Journal Entry
Week 12	Why not believe in God? Problem of Evil III	Hick, Antony, Stump, Adams Make 10th Virtue Journal Entry
Week 13	Why not believe in God? Skeptical Theism Divine Hiddenness	McBrayer Schellenberg, Moser Make 11th Virtue Journal Entry
PART IV: FAITH AND REASON		
Week 14	What is faith and is it rational?	Jackson Make Final Virtue Journal Entry
<i>Thanksgiving Break</i>		Virtue Project Part II
Week 15	Could religious belief amount to knowledge?	Dougherty and Tweedt, Plantinga, Hasker Paper #3
Finals Week		FINAL EXAM